

If Dawson Is The End For Hopkins: He's Been The Only One Of The Kind

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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Tonight WBC light heavyweight champ Bernard Hopkins 52-5-2 (32) will take on former title holder Chad Dawson 30-1 (17) in what may be perhaps the last big fight of his stellar career. I refer to Hopkins as the champ because until he's defeated for the WBC version of the title - he has to be considered the top light heavyweight fighter/boxer in the world. At least based on his body of work and all that he brings to the ring as a fighter and technician, despite him fighting with diminished skills at age 47.

Six months ago Hopkins and Dawson fought almost two full rounds and nothing was decided. Dawson slammed Hopkins to the canvas late in the second round and Bernard sustained a shoulder injury and couldn't continue. The fight was eventually and correctly ruled no-contest and tonight we get to see the do-over which in reality will be their first and only meeting. Granted, nothing was settled when they last met, but there is one thing we know, and that is Chad Dawson holds every advantage over Hopkins that one fighter could hover over another. You name it, Dawson gets the check over Hopkins in every category with the exceptions being experience and toughness. In addition to that he posses a style that has troubled Hopkins over his career.

Sure Bernard can adapt to any style, but since his 40th birthday he has been most troubled by fighters who are fast and throw a lot of punches. However, those style fighters (Joe Calzaghe & Jermain Taylor) didn't go at Hopkins in anger and try to take his head off, and they were that much the better for it. And that may be Hopkins' biggest asset tonight. Because of the animosity between he and Dawson, it's not hard to envision Chad trying to really put his stamp on this fight and become the first fighter to stop Hopkins. And if Chad loses his cool, which isn't out of the question since Bernard will be doing everything in his power to lead him into doing that, it opens the door for Hopkins to notch his most impressive win since beating light heavyweight title holder Antonio Tarver six years ago.

Everyone knows what Hopkins will have to deal with to beat Dawson. He'll need to overcome height, reach, speed, youth and father time, and that's the short list. Hopkins hasn't won by stoppage in eight years and it's hard to picture him stopping Dawson later this evening.

So lets assume that Hopkins loses for the sake of argument.

For starters, Hopkins legacy can't be hurt in the least, even if Dawson knocked him out with the first clean punch he landed in the first round. There will be plenty of time to do career retrospective pieces on Hopkins if he loses to Dawson. However, as amazing as Hopkins has

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been inside the ring, what he's done as a self manager outside it far eclipses Floyd Mayweather (who learned how to sell himself from Vince McMahon) and that's the part of Hopkins career that boggles my mind that never is mentioned in articles about him.

Hopkins was hindered from the time he got out of prison and turned pro in 1988 after serving five and a half years for armed robbery. He was a former convict, he didn't possess an Olympic medal, he wasn't movie-star good looking, he fought a style that only sophisticated boxing fans could appreciate, his fights weren't terribly exciting and his prison mentality put many big money backers off. Only he believed in himself as a fighter and man. He refused to compromise in any way shape or form and learned the business side of boxing.

Yes, Hopkins made some managerial mistakes along the way but eventually beat the system and boxing establishment (how many fighters/greats can say that?) and managed to earn some of his biggest purses and signature victories at the end of his career. And to top it off he kept the money he would've had to pay a manager for himself. Yes, Hopkins grasped that no one would look out for him as a manager the way he would and eventually could.

What distinguishes Hopkins from other fighters who were involved with the business end of their careers is that he prepares for the negotiating table like he does the boxing ring. Bernard is one of the few fighters who understood just how important not losing was/is. He knew that as long as he kept winning, sanctioning bodies, promoters and even other fighters could never hold all the leverage over him. Fully aware that without big money backing him and him not being a media superstar, he was always one loss away from being at the mercy of a decentralized system. That's why he kept himself in great shape and never let the oldest trick in the book knock him off -- being offered big money bouts when the powers that be knew he couldn't get in supreme shape. Thus him losing and having no say over any direction of his career.

Hopkins has often talked about knowledge being the real power. So by practicing what he preached, he went about learning the business of boxing. He knows how much money is involved and where the money comes from. Knowing how the money is divided between pay-per-view and cable television, broadcast rights, advertising sponsorships, along with domestic and foreign sales, makes it much tougher for, as he calls them, "the good 'ol boy network" to bully him.

Here's a fighter who competed in the ring against lions as an all-time great, and at the same time has swam with the sharks who yield the real power in boxing outside the ring. At worst, he

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has only been nicked and scraped by them, instead of being eaten alive.

Yet it is Mr. Hopkins' understanding of how boxing operated - more so than any other fighter - that makes him unique in the history of the sweet science. If tonight is the end of the road for Bernard Hopkins, he'll retire with his health, wealth and dignity, adding his name to another short list. It'll be some time before the boxing world sees another Bernard Hopkins, if ever.

Oh, and if he beats Dawson, the legacy escalates and the final chapter will have yet to be written. No, I won't bet on Hopkins to beat Dawson tonight, but I certainly won't bet on Dawson either. It's utterly amazing that despite him nearing 50 and fighting another young lion that I dare not bet against Bernard Hopkins in a fight I'm picking him to lose.